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SCIENCE :

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JOHN MICHELS, Editor.

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The lecture of Dr. George F. Beard on what he prefers to call "Mesmeric Trance," delivered this week before the New York Academy of Sciences, in the hall of the New York Academy of Medicine, received the close attention of an audience the majority of which, apparently, witnessed the experiments for the first time.

Dr. Beard described, briefly, the various forms of trance with which neurologists are familiar, and was supported by eight trance subjects, who exhibited manifestations of trance phenomena, to the equal satisfaction of the lecturer and his appreciative audience.

In regard to the genuineness of Dr. Beard's demonstrations we have no doubt that, substantially, they were *bona fide*, but it seemed apparent that the miserable objects who did duty on the occasion overacted their parts, and it may be even now an open question whether Dr. Beard or his audience was more imposed upon. Without intending to assert that an imposition was intended or practiced on the occasion, it is not difficult to show, probably, that many of the experiments might have been illusions. Two of the so-called patients were evidently trained performers, if not professional actors; if merely amateurs they surely missed their vocation. One of these patients could throw himself from an erect position to the stage, on his face, with the ease of an acrobat; the other declaimed Shakespeare at short notice, with the energy and persistence of a barrel organ. Other experiments also developed phenomena, which were not part of the programme. The boy who ate

Cayenne pepper in a trance, believing it to be sugar, appeared to be not inconvenienced in the least when he returned to a normal condition. But still more remarkable was the behavior of the patient who was made "stone deaf." Dr. Beard shouted in vain to this man, a tuning fork was sounded, a bell rung, and even a pistol fired close to his devoted head, while the patient remained eloquently silent and apparently oblivious to all external sounds.

To de-hypnotize the subject, Dr. Beard, unmindful of the fact that he was supposed to be addressing a deaf person, said, in an ordinary tone of voice: "It's all right!" that being the usual phrase employed. To the surprise of many present, the patient (perhaps not desiring a *contretemps* to mar the performance) took the cue and quietly resumed his seat.

To a popular audience Dr. Beard's theories and experiments might have partaken of the character of a revelation, but we believe that nearly all our present knowledge of the subject dates from Braid's book on Hypnotism, published more than twenty years ago.

The policy of such public exhibitions may be well questioned; in Vienna they have been prohibited, and as no new truth can be gained or science advanced by repeating these experiments in such a manner, why make them the subject for an evening's amusement before a scientific society?

The patients selected perform their parts constantly, and thus become finally, perhaps unconsciously, more and more trained to elaborate their antics, so that, even admitting the genuineness of the performance, the experiments may be, at least so far, manufactured.

The subjects of Dr. Beard are chiefly selected from the nervous classes of our population, and although they may be willing to air their peculiarities before a fashionable audience, it would appear to be a charitable course to keep them from such public exhibitions which can result only in aggravating their morbid tendencies.

NEW YORK ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.

The Committee on Lectures announces that the remainder of the course will embrace five lectures, to be delivered at the new Hall of the Academy of Medicine, No. 12 West Thirty-first street, New York City, on the third Monday of each month.

These lectures are free to the public, but admission is strictly confined to those holding tickets, which may be obtained of D. S. Martin, 236 West Fourth street; W. P. Trowbridge, School of Mines, East Forty-ninth street, and Alex. A. Julien, School of Mines, East Forty-ninth street.

The programme includes the following lectures: January 17th, Respiration, by Dr. J. W. S. Arnold; February 21st, The Reptilian Affinities of Birds, by Professor Edward S. Morse; March 21, Sensation and Pain, by Dr. Charles Fayette Taylor; April 18th, Temple Architecture of the Tenth to the Fifteenth Century, by Professor George W. Plympton; May 10th, The Organic Elements, by Professor Albert R. Leeds.